

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-03 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00

DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 CU-02

/053 W

----- 102057

R 052203Z AUG 75

FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 72

INFO AMCONSUL CALI

AMCONSUL MEDELLIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 7396

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT PINR CO

SUBJ: NEW RECTOR TAKES OVER NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

1. ON AUG 5 LUIS EDUARDO MESA PPLASQUEZ TOOK OVER THE POST OF RECTOR OF THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY FROM LUIS CARLOS PEREZ, WIDELY KNOWN AS THE "MARXIST RECTOR" (BOGOTA 6480). PEREZ, IN A FAREWELL TALK WITH HIS STAFF SAID THAT HIS TEAM'S WORK OF "DEMOCRATIZING" THE UNIVERSITY WAS CUT SHORT JUST AS IT WAS BEGINNING. HOWEVER, MOST OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT MESA WILL FOLLOW PEREZ' LEAD IN ADMINISTRATION OF THE NATION'S LARGEST UNIVERSITY. MESA HIMSELF HAS PUBLICALLY STATED THAT HE IS IN COMPLETE ACCORD WITH PEREZ' PAST POLICIES, WHICH IS INTERPRETED BY MANY TO MEAN THAT HE IS WILLING TO GO ALONG WITH DEMANDS BY STUDENTS AND FACULTY THAT THEY BE GIVEN A STRONG VOICE IN THE OPERATION OF THE SCHOOL. IT HAS ALSO BEEN RUMORED THAT MESA WAS HAND-PICKED BY PEREZ AS THE ONLY CANDIDATE WHO COULD KEEP STUDENT PEACE. A VARIETY OF EMBASSY SOURCES CITE MESA'S 8 MONTH PERFORMANCE AS RECTOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ANTIOQUIA AND ACCUSE HIM OF "GIVING IN" TO LEFTIST DOMINATED STUDENT ACTIVISTS JUST TO KEEP PEACE. THESE SOURCES EXPECT THE SAME PERFORMANCE AT THE NATIONAL UNIV AND PREDICT THAT STUDENTS WILL TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE REPUTATION TO CREATE TROUBLE. HOWEVER, ONE DEFENDER OF MESA IN THE MIN OF EDUCATION SAID THAT MESA'S APPARENT ACQUIES-
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CENCE TO STUDENT DEMANDS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ANTIOQUIA WAS ONLY

A TACTIC TO KEEP THE CAMPUS CALM AND PRODUCE A SMOOTH TRANSITION FROM EARLIER NEAR ANARCHY TO AN ATMOSPHERE OF SERIOUS LEARNING. THIS LAST SOURCE ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT MESA, A TALENTED ADMINISTRATOR, WOULD BE DAMAGED BY THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY WHICH HAS BEEN LARGELY RESISTANT TO ALL BUT THE MOST HEAVY-HANDED KIND OF ADMINISTRATION.

3. MESA WILL INDEED HAVE HIS HANDS FULL. PEREZ WAS ABLE TO MAINTAIN RELATIVE CALM ON THE CAMPUS WITH HIS REPUTATION AS A MARXIST AND WITH HIS GRANDSTAND PLAYS CALLING FOR "DEMOCRATIZATION" AND A GREATER STUDENT AND FACULTY ROLE IN ADMINISTRATION. BUT MESA DOES NOT CARRY THE MARXIST LABEL AND WILL HAVE THREE NEW POTENTIAL PROBLEMS WITH WHICH TO DEAL. FIRST, STUDENTS AND FACULTY HAVE ALREADY LISTED TO THE STIMULATING RHETORIC RE CO-GOVERNMENT (PARTICIPATION IN ADMINISTRATION) OF THE UNIV AND WILL WANT QUICK ACTION NOW. SECOND, THE UNIVERSITY POPULATION HAS GROWN BY ALMOST 9,000 DURING THE PAST YEAR AND MOST NEW OPENINGS HAVE GONE TO STUDENTS FROM OUTSIDE BOGOTA AND FROM LOWER ECONOMIC CLASSES. THESE "OUTSIDERS" ARE WIDELY CONSIDERED TO BE MOST INCLINED TO ACTIVISM. THIRD, A BILL HAS BEEN INTRODUCED IN CONGRESS WHICH WOULD GRANT "INDEPENDENCE" TO THE UNIVERSITY THROUGH REDUCTION OF GOVERNMENT CONTROL, ELECTION OF THE RECTOR, AND GREATER STUDENT-FACULTY PARTICIPATION IN ADMINISTRATION. THERE APPEARS TO BE LITTLE SUPPORT FOR THE BILL AND IF IT DIES IN COMMITTEE, ACTIVIST STUDENT REACTION WILL NO DOUBT BE SOMETHING LESS THAN FATALISTIC.

4. THE UNIVERSITY WILL REOPEN ON AUG 25 WITH THE HISTORIC PROBABILITY FOR ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEMS DURING THE COMING YEAR, ESPECIALLY IN THE AREA OF STUDENT DISRUPTIONS, AND MESA IS EXPECTED TO HAVE SOME DIFFICULTY KEEPING THE CAMPUS CALM. YET, THERE ARE SOME HOPEFUL SIGNS FOR THE FUTURE. THE UNIVERSITY HAS OPENED ITS DOORS TO A LARGER NUMBER AND A WIDER VARIETY OF STUDENTS, THUS EXPANDING THE AVAILABILITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION. THE GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC OPINION HAS RECENTLY EXHIBITED A KEENER INTEREST IN THE FUTURE OF COLOMBIA'S LARGEST UNIVERSITY. FINALLY, AN ORGANIZATION OF NATIONAL UNIVERSITY ALUMNI IS NOW BEING FORMED TO ACT AS AN ADVISORY BOARD AND PATRON TO THE SCHOOL. MORE RESPONSIBILITY IS BEING DEMONSTRATED IN THE APPROACH TO PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION AND IT MAY HELP TO BALANCE THE SEEMINGLY

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EVER-PRESENT DISRUPTIVE FACTORS IN THE MONTHS TO COME.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: UNIVERSITIES, PERSONNEL APPOINTMENTS, PERSONNEL RESIGNATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 05 AUG 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975BOGOTA07396
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750272-0030
From: BOGOTA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750879/aaaacrof.tel
Line Count: 109
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 SEP 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <05 SEP 2003 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <17 NOV 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: NEW RECTOR TAKES OVER NATIONAL UNIVERSITY
TAGS: PINT, PINR, SEDU, CO, (MESA PLASQUEZ, LUIS EDUARDO), (PEREZ, LUIS CARLOS)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006